

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of the claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of the claims in the application, without prejudice. Applicants declare no new matter has been added by way of these amendments.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method of drilling a well comprising a stabilization treatment ~~A method of stabilising~~ an underground formation surrounding a borehole, wherein said stabilization treatment comprising comprised placing a treatment fluid in the formation, the treatment fluid comprising a cross-linkable polymer and a cross-linking agent, allowing the treatment fluid to gel in-situ, and pumping, after placement of the treatment fluid in the formation, an activator fluid into the well to accelerate the crosslinking of the polymer and the development of the gel strength; and wherein said stabilization treatment is carried out during the drilling of the well.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the reaction between the activator and the treatment fluid is not exothermic.
3. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the cross-linkable polymer is a polymer containing acrylamide functional groups.
4. (Original) The method of claim 3, wherein the polymer comprises polyacrylamide, partially hydrolysed polyacrylamide or copolymers of acrylamides and acrylates.
5. (Previously presented) The method of claim 3, wherein the polymer is a partially hydrolysed polymer with a molecular weight of around 500,000.

6. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the cross-linking agent is a molecule or complex containing a reactive transition metal cation.

7. (Original) The method of claim 6, wherein the cross-linking agent is a zirconium lactate solution.

8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the activator comprises a solution of zirconium chloride or zirconium acetate.

9. (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the activator comprises a 5-20% solution of zirconium chloride in seawater.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the activator and/or treatment fluid includes colloidal silica.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the treatment fluid has a viscosity of up to 300 cp.

12. (Canceled)

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, whereby the treatment fluid and the activator are sequentially placed into the well through a drill string.

14. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the sequence is repeated.

15. (Previously presented) The method of claim 13, wherein the treatment fluid and the activator are separated from each other by spacer fluids.

16. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~12~~ 1, wherein the fluids are applied to ~~the~~ a zone of interest by means of a placement tool placed in the drill string which injects the fluids into the zone of interest via ports, while mechanically compressing the wall of the well by means of structures formed on the outside of the placement tool which act on the borehole wall as the drill string rotates.

17. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~12~~ 1, wherein the activator is stored in a downhole reservoir located near the bottom of the drill string and arranged to inject slugs of activator into a drilling fluid,

18. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the bottomhole well temperature ranges from about 4°C to about 25°C.

19. - 22. (Canceled)